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Afield at Flathead

BY P. M. SILLOWAY

ON the morning of my arrival at the University of Montana Biological Station at Bigfork, head of Flathead Lake, the presence of the long-tailed chat (*Icteria virens longicauda*) was attested by its characteristic calls in the bush. The Station is at least seventy miles north of Selish, where I last observed this species. It appears that this chat is working its way northward in the Rocky Mountain region of Montana, and instead of limiting its range to southern Montana, we are safe in expecting its occurrence in suitable localities throughout the north-western part of the state.

My collecting all the eggs (seven sets) in a small colony of the Holboell grebe (*Colymbus holboelli*) at Swan Lake last season was severely criticized. My actions were compared to those of the professional plume hunter, and I was accused of leaving a "devastated bird colony" in my wake. This criticism caused me to undertake a second visit to Swan Lake this season for the purpose of determining the approximate effects of my collecting upon the aggregate grebe life of the swamp at that place, and at considerable personal expense I organized another expedition to that locality. In my defense I claimed that my operations in the swamp would have but little effect upon the outcome in the aggregate. I give my notes for 1903 for what they are worth, believing that they will augment the fast accumulating mass of evidence to show that there is no occasion for misunderstanding between the conscientious oologist and the zealous bird protectionist.

On June 18, three nests of the Holboell grebe were found, two of five eggs each, and one of four, all covered and apparently partially incubated. Also a nest containing one fresh egg. On June 19, another nest was found containing one fresh egg. The foregoing data show that at least five pairs were nesting in the swamp, as many as were nesting in the preceding season. On June 22, a nest was found containing five eggs, covered, and apparently quite advanced in incubation. Hence at one time the swamp contained six nests, three with five eggs each, one with four eggs, and two with two eggs each. It is evident that the balance of grebe life in this colony was not greatly disturbed by my collecting of 1902, and as many grebes were cackling in the tangle in 1903 as were tenantry the swamp in 1902. The balance of bird life in nature is a mysterious fact. Why the same number of individuals or thereabout, will be found in the same area year after year, regardless of the natural increase or decrease, is an inexplicable matter. It is needless to say that in neither season did we kill any of the grebes, our depredations being limited to despoiling the nests as recorded.

The Townsend warbler attracted my attention this season by its abundance. I had regarded this warbler as rather uncommon in the Flathead region, but this season it appeared to outrank any other warbler in numbers. During June, after our arrival, its song could be heard at all hours of the day. The warbler frequented the larger trees, such as tamarack and Douglas spruce, singing from a station above the middle of such a tree. The song resembles the syllables, "Reet, reet, reet, reet-er, ee-zee," and can easily be identified by the regular ending "ee-zee," in which the "ee" is accented and prolonged. The first week of July was rainy and chilly, and after that time I heard no more of the singing of this warbler.

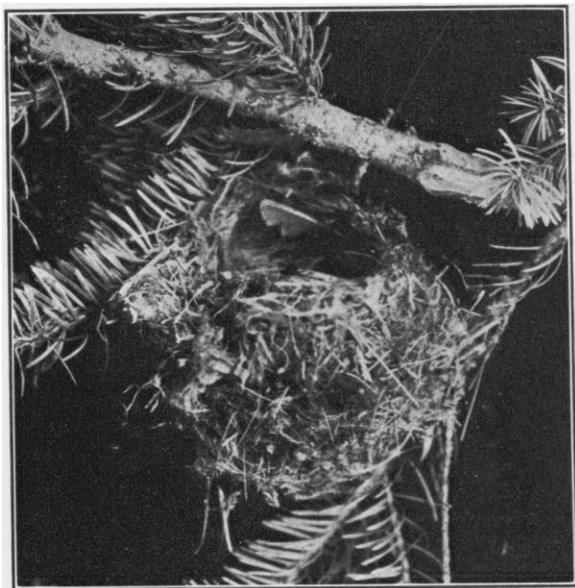
On June 15 I found a nest of the Townsend warbler (*Dendroica townsendi*). It was in a clump of small fir trees on a rocky ridge formed by a "fault" near the

lake shore, 2,950 altitude. The nest was six feet from the ground, in a small fir surrounded by larger ones, so that the site was completely screened from passing view. The nest was made beside the main stem, situated like that of a chipping sparrow's, which it greatly resembled. It was made externally of coarse weed-stems and grasses, and was lined with finer grasses and horsehair. The cavity was two inches in diameter, and one and three-eighths inches deep. There were five young nearly fledged, showing the black crown and yellow superciliary line, and dull wing-bands. All the younglings were infested with a parasitic grub, which had eaten a hole in the skull or upper part of the neck behind, and their wriggling forms could be seen in the skull or other cavity, from which it appeared that the parasite had eaten the entire contents, though the youngsters were energetically stretching forth their heads for food at the approach of the industrious parents. The male was most active in bringing food to the nest, and he was secured with little difficulty. The female was shyer, and I could capture her only after long (and impatient) waiting. (I shall be glad to send specimens of this parasite to any person who may be investigating this subject).

The cedar waxwing is reputed to be lacking in vocal powers, except the faint lisp-ing call and such variations of it as are possible in bird language. This summer for the first time I heard a cedar waxwing (*Ampelis cedrorum*) utter another cry, showing that it can give forth abundant sound should occasion ever require.

The waxwing is especially

numerous in this portion of the Flathead region, and desiring a skin for the collection, I sallied out one evening before dusk with my little collecting gun. Two waxwings were sitting near each other on a lower branch of a fir, about twenty feet from the ground. They were evidently courting. He would sidle over to her, rub his breast against hers, rub his bill caressingly upon hers, and then sidle back to his former place. Then the other bird would go through a similar performance. Disliking to kill one without the other, I tried to get both at one shot, all that my gun carried. One of the birds fell wounded. As I picked it up, it gave utterance to a loud, shrill whistling cry, a continuous piteous cry not unlike the screaming of a young robin when distressed. It is a curious fact that some birds have a peculiar cry which they use only on occasions of great fright or peril. When a long-eared owl (*Asio wilsonianus*) is chloroformed, it will utter a peculiar shrill whistle; but whoever heard this owl emit such a call in the ordinary circumstances of life? So it is with the cedar waxwing, for it is certainly capable of producing a most piercing scream when its life is sorely threatened.



NEST OF RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET
PHOTO BY PROF. M. J. ELROD

This season for the first time I found a nest of the Louisiana tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) with eggs. It was on the fourth of July. The nest was in a tall Douglas spruce, on a short branch among the lowest having vegetation. The site was twenty-five feet from the ground, on a horizontal fork, the nest being held in place by surrounding twigs. It was made of coarse forky twigs as an outer framework, the walls being made of fine rootlets, and the lining of horsehair. The cavity was two and three-fourths inches in diameter, and one and one half inches deep. The nest was found by watching the birds as they frequented the place, and finally seeing the female take her place on the nest. When disturbed, the female was sitting, and she remained on the nest until I was quite near it. The site was a tuft of twigs four feet from the main stem. There were four eggs, incubated 50 per cent or more. When removed from its site, the loose twigs in the outer part of the nest fell away, like that part of a grosbeak's nest.

The ruby-crowned kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) is very common in this region. In the middle of June I spent many minutes watching the birds in their movements in the tops of the medium-sized evergreens, but was unable to find any nests, probably owing to the fact that nest-building was finished and the females were sitting. The males were singing in the upper parts of the taller trees, but were extremely shy and managed to keep out of sight from the inquisitive observer. It is a queer song, beginning with two or three squeaky notes like "tsee" followed by "chir, chir, chir, whittle, whittle, whittle." and several other rather indistinct notes.

At length, on July 6, I took a nest of the ruby-crowned kinglet, with both parent birds. The nest was situated about fifteen feet from the ground, near the extremity of a branch in a fir tree beside a road through the woods. The site was six feet from the main stem. The nest was saddled on an oblique twig on the under side of the branch, and was also somewhat pendent from several small twigs about which the walls were woven. The structure was four inches in diameter externally, and three inches high. The opening, which was at the top, was two and one-fourth inches wide, and the cavity was one and seven-eighths inches deep. The nest walls were made of dark green lichen, deerhair, gossamer, and bark shreds. The lining was hair, soft downy feathers, and lichen. There were eight young in the nest, ready to leave in a short time. The accompanying illustration, made from a photo by Prof. M. J. Elrod, shows the position and site of the nest.

Lewistown, Montana.

A Few Records Supplementary to Grinnell's Check-list of California Birds

BY JOSEPH MAILLARD

WHEN a list of birds of any locality appears in print it usually occurs that observers in the given area will find that they have some records and notes which are not referred to by the author of the list. This is due to several reasons. Either the observers have not realized that some particular records were worth mentioning, or the mention of certain things may have been postponed for the moment and lost sight of for the time being, or certain parties may not have